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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1489
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 1773
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SUBJECT: ARGENTINE REACTION TO RESCUE OF FARC HOSTAGES IN COLOMBIA

REF: BUENOS AIRES 0014

¶1. (U) Summary: Argentine President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) welcomed the news of the July 2 rescue of 15 FARC hostages. Although her initial public reaction July 2 stopped short of praising Uribe for the GOC's successful operation, the following day the GOA announced she had called Uribe to say the liberation of the hostages was progress for "democracy, peace and freedom in the sister Republic of Colombia." Opposition leader and Buenos Aires mayor Mauricio Macri congratulated Uribe effusively, as did Elisa Carrio of the opposition Civic Coalition. Press pundits noted that the dramatic rescue operation was a reminder of Nestor Kirchner's participation in the failed December 2007 rescue effort led by Hugo Chavez (reftels). "La Nacion" ran an op-ed on page one under the headline: "The mistake of trusting more in Chavez than Uribe." End summary.

CFK Hails Betancourt's Release

¶2. (SBU) At a July 2 public appearance, CFK remarked on Betancourt's release, calling it a "victory of life and liberty, the most important values," she said. She ignored the rescue of the other hostages and did not mention the Uribe government at all, but reminded her audience of her "commitment with the cause" of securing Betancourt's release. In her December 2007 inaugural address, CFK had made a plea (with Uribe present in the audience) to redouble efforts to secure Betancourt's release. She met with Betancourt's mother later that day, and by the end of that month her husband Nestor had embarked on the unsuccessful "bungle in the jungle" led by Chavez to "guarantee" the release of FARC hostages (reftels). In her July 2 remarks, CFK said, "I send greetings to her mother, dear Yolanda (Pulecio), and to Ingrid. I believe much in God, and I also believe in signs."

¶3. (U) FM Jorge Taiana announced July 2 his "profound joy and satisfaction" for the release of the 15 hostages. "With Ingrid Betancourt's family we enjoy a special relationship of friendship and affection." The following day, he announced that CFK had called Uribe to say the liberation of the hostages was progress for "democracy, peace and freedom in the sister Republic of Colombia." Taiana said he had called his Colombian counterpart as well to say that the GOA would continue to condemn kidnappings and call for the immediate and unconditional release of kidnapped hostages everywhere.

Opposition Vocal in its Support for Uribe

¶4. (U) Mauricio Macri, Mayor of Buenos Aires and a leader of the center-right opposition, immediately praised Uribe for securing the release of Betancourt and the other hostages, noting it demonstrates "an important step in (Colombia's) struggle for the defense of democracy." He also added that the welcome news brings an end to the dramatic detention of Betancourt and the other hostages and brings relief and tranquility to Latin America's citizens who value liberty, peace, and human rights."

¶5. (U) Elisa Carrio, leader of the center-left opposition Civic Coalition, expressed "joy" over Betancourt's release and said "it was great news for the region that it was the Colombian state that ran the rescue operation."

¶6. (U) Center-right daily "La Nacion" ran an analysis by leading columnist Joaquin Morales-Sola on page one under the headline: "The mistake of trusting more in Chavez than Uribe." Morales-Sola claimed that CFK had repeatedly told others that Uribe was indifferent to the plight of Betancourt and that it was to his electoral advantage to let Betancourt remain captive. Morales-Sola recalled CFK's cold, dismissive treatment of Uribe at the March summit in Santo Domingo of Rio Group leaders, and he concluded that "CFK took it upon herself to take up the cause of the kidnapped Colombian politician, but she did very little to resolve the situation by helping Uribe, the only person on the planet who could determine a strategy and establish a way to secure the freedom of Ingrid Betancourt."

Comment

¶7. (SBU) CFK may have been prompted to call Uribe July 3 by the poor press reviews she got for the previous day's ungenerous acknowledgement of the GOC's breathtaking success in rescuing the hostages. It's encouraging that, upon reflection, she ultimately extended the well-deserved congratulations.

WAYNE